

DECISION MEMO

Beetle Release Project

USDA Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest, Saco Ranger District Town of Jackson, Carroll County, and Town of Pinkham's Grant, Coos County, New Hampshire

I. DECISION

A. Background

Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is an invasive exotic plant responsible for the degradation of many prime wetland habitats throughout New England and the United States. Few native species exist on sites where purple loosestrife dominates. This reduction in plant diversity has wide-ranging effects, including a reduction in food and habitat for wildlife, as well as an alteration of hydrology and soil structure in the affected environment. The buildup of debris around the roots of loosestrife plants enables them to invade deeper water, form dense stands that shade out other emergents, and push out floating vegetation by closing open water spaces. This plant is an introduced species whose distribution and spread has been enhanced by the absence of natural enemies and the disturbance of natural systems.

The White Mountain National Forest has identified a need to release two specific beetle species (*Galerucella californiensis* and *Galerucella pusilla*) to control purple loosestrife along the Route 16 corridor on the south side of Pinkham Notch. These two beetles defoliate purple loosestrife to the point purple loosestrife does not proliferate and alter natural vegetative communities. The beetles are relatively host specific but are known to forage on two native plants. These native plants are not known to exist in Pinkham Notch.

B. The Proposed Action

The District Ranger of the Saco Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest is proposing to use biocontrol agents (specifically, two stem and leaf-eating *Galerucella* beetles, *G. californiensis* and *G. pusilla*) to control purple loosestrife along Rt. 16 between the Rocky Branch and Glen Ellis Parking Areas. Biocontrol is a viable alternative to more controversial, often ineffective and expensive methods for treating this invasive, such as mechanical cutting, pulling, and herbicide application. The release of biocontrol agents would introduce a self-perpetuating management regime as opposed to the more costly and labor-intensive conventional control methods that require continuous long-term maintenance to address extensive seed bank germinates and fragment resprouts.

C. Description of Decision

The Forest will purchase approximately 2,000-3,000 beetles from the NJ Department of Agriculture toward the middle of May, and store them either at the Jackson Elementary School or the Saco Ranger District until the proposed release date of late May or early June. The beetles will be released at two or three locations within the Project Area that have the highest purple loosestrife concentrations. The site will be monitored over several years to determine degree of success and if additional or other actions are required.

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

A. Category of Exclusion: The project is within the category of exclusion 31.2-6, Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction (Service level D, FSH 7709.56).

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances:

1. No extra-ordinary circumstances are present, including no known Threatened, Endangered, Proposed or Sensitive Species and/or their Critical Habitat (see Biological Evaluation in planning record). The activities planned for this project will not adversely affect the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species' designated critical habitat. Therefore, I have decided that this action will have 'no effect' on listed species or their critical habitats.
2. The project area is within the Ellis River watershed, a municipal water source for the town of Jackson. No ground disturbing actions would occur with project implementation. Eradication of an invasive wetland species is deemed beneficial to the ecosystem functions of the watershed. This project would not alter water quantity or quality.
3. This decision does not affect Wilderness, National Recreation Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas, or Research Natural Areas. The closest Wilderness Areas, the Presidential – Dry River Wilderness, lies as close as ½ mile and as far as five miles from the project. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect any Wilderness Area.
4. Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Areas will not be affected by this project. No ground disturbing actions are proposed for this project. In addition the project is within the Route 16 corridor, a known, disturbed area.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement was conducted with a project scoping report and letter that went to approximately 12 interested individuals, agencies, and adjacent landowners. The scoping letters were mailed on February 15, 2005 and a Legal Notice was placed in the Manchester Union Leader on the same date. The scoping letter was also placed on the White Mountain National Forest web site. One comment was received two weeks after the close of the comment period. This letter highly supported the project.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including:

- **The White Mountain National Forest Plan** The Act requires all projects and activities to be consistent with the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan has been reviewed in consideration of this project.

This decision is consistent with the standards and guidelines contained in the Forest Plan (Planning Record).

- **Sensitive Species** - Potential effects of this decision on sensitive species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation (Planning Record). This decision will have “no impact” on sensitive species.
- **National Environmental Policy Act** - This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this decision supports compliance with this Act.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL

This decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

- 1) Further information about this decision can be obtained from Kathy Starke, Project Team Leader, Saco Ranger Station, 33 Kancamagus Highway, Conway, NH 03818. Kathy can be reached at 603-447-5448 (ext 118) or use TTY @ 603-447-3121
- 2) **E-mail:** kstarke@fs.fed.us

VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment, as it is within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Planning Record.

/s/Terry Miller

4/5/2005

TERRY MILLER
District Ranger

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